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ABSTRACT

Cultural understanding and intercultural communication are important for young people in today's world. Many communities, including Australia, are still negotiating reconciliation with indigenous peoples and the harmonious acceptance of all cultures within the national community. Addressing the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) education theme, "Learning to Live Together," this paper discusses Brisbane (Australia) Catholic Education's Key Learning Area of Cultural Literacy and Languages. The paper outlines both the curriculum framework and the practical application of the theory. A series of teaching modules has been developed to exemplify the infusion of five key concepts across the curriculum. It discusses two modules used in developing visual arts, "Using the Bible from an Asia-Pacific Perspective" and "Mambo Meets Manga." (Contains 10 references.) (BT)

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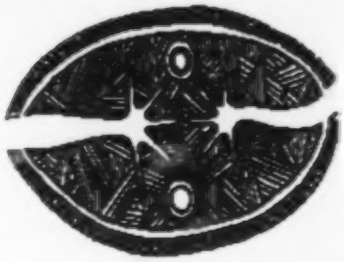

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"Cultural Literacy and Languages: Enabling Students to Learn to Live Together"

by

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CULTURAL LITERACY AND LANGUAGES: ENABLING STUDENTS TO LEARN TO LIVE TOGETHER

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Cultural understanding and inter-cultural communications are of paramount importance for young people of today. The world in which students live is rapidly developing into a global society characterised by interdependence and cross-cultural communication. People increasingly face the challenge of living in multicultural communities in which their values and cultural practices are different from those of their neighbours. Many communities, including Australia, are still negotiating reconciliation with indigenous peoples and the harmonious acceptance of all cultures within the national community. Australian schools need to respond to these broad issues by developing curriculum that reflects the diverse nature of Australia's cultures and those of the region in which it is located. Students need to be prepared for living as citizens in an ever-changing and interdependent world.

In addressing the theme of Learning to live together, this paper details how one education authority is attempting to realise this as a lived reality for its students. Brisbane Catholic Education is responsible for 129 primary and secondary schools covering a large geographical area in South East Queensland. A part of its core curriculum is the Key Learning Area of Cultural Literacy and Languages. Cultural Literacy and Languages education contributes to a holistic and transformative curriculum for schools in the twenty-first century. This is achieved by acknowledging that cultural literacy, as a developmental process enhanced by appropriate learning experiences, involves the acquisition of cultural knowledge, skills and understandings. This leads to a greater knowledge of one's own and other cultures. Knowing, understanding and appreciating another culture enables active participation in that culture. In turn this provides the opportunity for individuals to return to their own culture and reflect upon it from an alternative perspective. This is an inherent feature of a transformative curriculum.

At this point it is useful to explore the evolution of the Key Learning Area Cultural Literacy and Languages within Brisbane Catholic Education. In 1994 an independent review of the Queensland school curriculum, *Shaping the Future*, was conducted (Wiltshire, McMeniman & Tolhurst, 1994). All Queensland school systems responded to this review. At a time when all other school education authorities within Australia adopted Languages other than English (LOTEs) as a Key Learning Area within the curriculum, Brisbane Catholic Education adopted the broader term Cultural Literacy and Languages comprising two aspects: cultural literacy across the curriculum and a language other than English. Curriculum design and support for languages other than English will be provided through the syllabuses written for all educational sectors that include LOTE in their curriculum. However, as Cultural Literacy and Languages is unique to Brisbane Catholic Education, it has had to develop the support mechanisms for Cultural Literacy across the Curriculum. Support material and resources have been developed. The material and resources integrate aspects of cultural literacy in all areas of learning including Visual Arts education.

Cultural Literacy and Languages education

This unique approach to the Key Learning Area resulted from a collaborative process involving all schools within Brisbane Catholic Education. School responses overwhelmingly supported the role of culture in language teaching and offered this as a more appropriate term in consideration of the purposes of the Key Learning Area in question. Subsequent curriculum development commenced with a research project, *Know thy neighbour, love thy neighbour. An exploration of languages and cultures curriculum for Brisbane Catholic Education schools* (Australian Catholic University, 1997). The extensive literature review assisted in the process of arriving at a definition of Cultural Literacy and Languages as a Key Learning Area. This was achieved by focussing on: the language/culture link, language education in general and the relationship of languages and cultures curriculum to other curriculum areas.

Building on the recommendations of the research project a *Position Paper Cultural Literacy and Languages for Brisbane Catholic Education schools*, outlining the philosophy and principles of learning in this area, was developed (Brisbane Catholic Education, 1998). It promotes the ideal outcome as being the development of

culturally literate individuals. Culturally literate people are able to participate in and moderate their own culture and understand, negotiate and participate to some worthwhile extent in the culture of others. The Position Paper on Cultural Literacy and Languages describes culture as a dynamic set of products, behaviours, beliefs and value systems where products and behaviours can be seen as the observable phenomena and beliefs and value systems are the unobservable. The unobservable phenomena represent ideational and conceptual life which is accessed through language and other means of communication. Figure 1 presents a diagrammatic representation of the observable and unobservable aspects of culture.

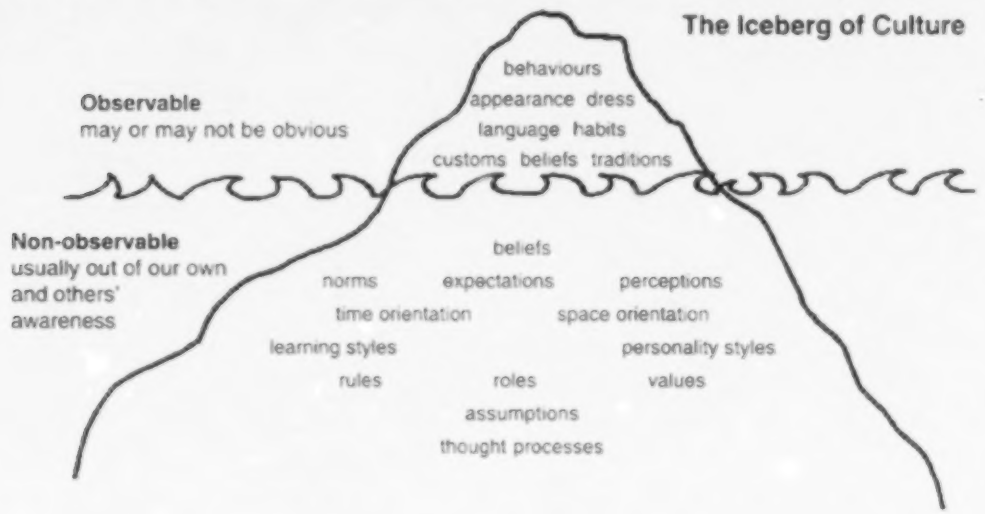

Figure 1. The Iceberg of Culture (Brisbane Catholic Education, 1998: 4)

Cultural literacy is concerned with perspectives – an appreciation of alternative realities. An appreciation of self is explored through questions such as *"What is an Australian?"* and *"Who am I?"*. It is only through an exploration and understanding of *the other* that the concept of *self* is more fully developed. Metaphor assists in this process. For example Smolicz, in an attempt to define *Australian-ness* uses metaphor:

> "Is it possible to be an Australian in an English way; an Australian in an Aboriginal way; an Australian in a Jewish, Polish, German, Italian, Greek and many other ways – corresponding to the complex ethnic origins of modern Australians?"
>
> One could compare this form of Australian-ness to a beam of light which, when refracted through a prism, shows itself to be composed of an array of different colours, that together give ONE light. (Smolicz, 1989: 20)

Integral to our understanding of the message is our capacity to interpret the visual image on which he draws.

Arts education contributes significantly to the development of cultural literacy through the identified five strands in Queensland Arts Curriculum: Dance, Drama, Media, Music and Visual Arts. The Brisbane Catholic Education *Position Paper: Window and Mirror, Arts Education* describes the student learning focuses in terms of education **in** the Arts, **through** the Arts and **about** the Arts (Brisbane Catholic Education, 1996). This is consistently reflected in Arts education throughout Australia. *A statement for the Arts for Australian schools* asserts that arts are "deeply embedded in and are outward expression of cultures. The arts help to shape cultural identity, to reaffirm, challenge and give life to beliefs and traditions of cultural groups." (Australian Education Council, 1994:8). As the visual art of a culture is one of its most observable features, it provides ease of access into the unobservable aspects of a culture. Learning in Visual Arts promotes a transformative and holistic curriculum when teachers have eclecticism as a guiding principle in their curriculum design. Visual artists may draw on a narrower range of experiences in their presentation and response to artwork. However, visual arts educators are encouraged to draw on a wide range of experiences in providing students with the capacities essential to enabling them to learn to live together.

Planning for the development of cultural literacy across the curriculum

Further to the *Position Paper: Cultural Literacy and Languages*, Brisbane Catholic Education has developed a Curriculum Framework: Cultural Literacy across the Curriculum for use by teachers of all Key Learning Areas. The touchstone to the document is the identification of five key concepts: Culture, Diversity, Interdependence, Identity and Reconciliation. Whilst maintaining the integrity of the discipline, these key concepts become the lenses through which learning is filtered. Conscious inclusion of the key concepts throughout planning and teaching contributes to students' learning experiences by offering alternative perspectives through which learning is approached.

The intent of the five concepts is to promote an approach to learning that is broader than that provided by a more traditional curriculum. The definition of culture is not restricted to the high culture of a community. It is concerned with the critical exploration of the cultural determination of knowledge, processes, skills and attitudes inherent in a given curriculum area. For example in the Arts, teachers should address the following questions related to *Culture* in order to ensure inclusive learning experiences:

- How do the Arts reflect representations of particular cultures?
- How do particular cultures express and embody ideas, feelings and beliefs and cultural heritage through the Arts?
- How do particular cultures celebrate community through the Arts?
- Why do the Arts serve as a means for particular cultures to explore and portray values, social and moral stances and belief systems?

Similarly, in addressing *Diversity*, teachers can consider the following:

- What are the various ways by which particular cultures embody their spiritual reality in symbolic form?
- How do the Arts help us to understand, empathise and appreciate cultural similarities and differences?
- What are the similarities and differences in the way cultural festivals and special days are celebrated through multi-art experiences around the world?

When considering *Interdependence* teachers reflect on:

- How can the Arts inform our knowledge of our own and other cultures in our world today and those that were representative of the past?
- How can we develop aesthetic appreciation of the Arts that are representative of other cultures?
- How can artistic symbolism, self expression and creativity of similar and different cultures be shared, appreciated and celebrated?

Identity promotes the following questions:

- How can the Arts as symbol systems, represent feelings and emotions to evoke personal and community responses?
- How can we use the Arts to engender a sense of understanding about ourselves, our community and the world?
- How do the Arts represent our own culture?
- What traditions and values are behind the various arts produced in our own culture?
- How and why do individuals and communities express and respond to ideas, feelings and beliefs through the Arts?

Reconciliation is considered in its broadest form – that is reconciling new knowledge with old. It encourages teachers to explore the following issues:

- How can the Arts be used as a means to be aware of the cultural past-present continuum of our own and other cultures?
- How can we use the Arts to recognise, reconcile with and grow to appreciate cultural differences?
- Are stereotypes portrayed in the media true representations of different cultures?

The concept of infusion of multiple perspective across the curriculum is highly consistent with current educational philosophies. For example, the *Statement on Religious Education for Catholic Schools* (1997) acknowledges the need to consider multiple curriculum perspectives in teaching.

Current initiatives in Brisbane Catholic Education schools

As this Key Learning Area is a recent development in school curriculum, Brisbane Catholic Education has endeavoured to provide schools with a range of supportive mechanisms to facilitate the inclusion of appropriate methodologies and resources. Brisbane Catholic Education recognises that this Key Learning

Area addresses sensitive issues. It continues to encourage school communities to work towards curriculum renewal within their specific contexts rather than undertake major change for the sake of change. Curriculum renewal is seen to be more successful when school communities take ownership of the nature and direction of any planned changes. Implementation of the Cultural Literacy across the Curriculum initiative has been characterised by three phases: collaborative curriculum development, initial dissemination and familiarisation with the materials and school based implementation.

The collaborative curriculum development phase resulted in a sound theoretical framework that is supported by materials relevant to current classroom practice. This was achieved by the involvement of contemporary researchers in the field, current classroom practitioners and those with a passion for the area. In combination, they developed *Cultural Literacy across the Curriculum. A Framework*. It built significantly on both the research project *Know thy neighbour, love thy neighbour. An exploration of languages and cultures curriculum for Brisbane Catholic Education schools* (Australian Catholic University, 1997) and the *Position Paper Cultural Literacy and Languages for Brisbane Catholic Education schools* (Brisbane Catholic Education, 1998).

A comprehensive support package and resource kit covering all curriculum areas was compiled. The aim of support package was to exemplify the application of theory into practice through the provision of sample action plans, modules of work and cross-curricular ideas and activities. During the initial dissemination and familiarisation phase school communities had the opportunity to access the materials by participating in professional development activities.

A key aim of the professional development for teachers focussed on broadening horizons about culture and developing concepts of cultural literacy as compared with cultural understanding and multicultural education. From this point school communities determined the scope and direction for their future curriculum development appropriate to their individual contexts. Where capacity exists they have been supported in their endeavours. Thus, schools are at various stages in terms of their understanding and implementation.

The following section of this paper outlines the practical application of the theory by detailing individual schools' initiatives. As part of the Cultural Literacy across the Curriculum Support Package a series of teaching modules has been developed to exemplify the infusion of the five key concepts across the curriculum. Each module focuses one or more key learning areas. Collectively they cover each key learning area and every year level. It should be noted that there is not necessarily a module for each learning area at each year level.

Using the Bible from an Asia-Pacific perspective

The module, *Using The Bible From An Asia-Pacific Perspective* has been developed around the text, The Bible through Asian eyes (Takenaka & O'Grady, 1991). It aims to develop learning in Visual Arts and Religious Education. It uses an outcomes-based approach for curriculum design. At the same time it infuses all five Cultural Literacy across the Curriculum key concepts. Students are involved in learning experiences and activities in which they critically view the religious art from the Asia-Pacific region. Adopting a critical stance to respond to art encourages them to develop an awareness of how artists and viewers construct meaning from a particular worldview. This enables them to appreciate that construction of reality is individually unique. Additionally, the students become involved in the creation, manufacture and presentation of their own art works.

The some of the learning experiences developed to foster learning include:

- group discussions on various artworks and the factors that influenced the artists
- personal response to and interpretation of various art works
- investigation of the techniques involved in generating various art styles
- personal response and interpretation of scriptural text in art form.

Mambo meets manga

Another module provided in the support package that explores Visual Arts outcomes is *Mambo meets manga*. The creator of the module reflected on the process whereby units of work grow and adapt with teacher observation and through negotiation with students. The thematic unit of 'Art and Social Criticism', designed for Years 9 and 10 provided students with the opportunity to analyse the social commentary of Western artists such Hogarth and Goya. However, student interests focused on the pop art of Lichtenstein and Warhol. Central to the learning was the understanding of art being a mirror of society. A focus on Lichtenstein and Warhol cartoons and desire on the students' part to include Astro Boy, an example of Japanese animé cartoons, provided the teacher a good opportunity to update the unit. *Mambo meets manga* became a study of contemporary cartoons from the United States and Japan. Discussions and investigations centred on how cartoons reflected cultures, showed diversity, framed identity and demonstrated cultural

interdependence. Of equal importance was the learning that engaged students and provided opportunities for demonstrating visual arts outcomes.

Conclusion

This paper has focussed on Learning to live together. However we cannot live together harmoniously without learning to know, learning to do and learning to be. This paper has attempted to illustrate the appropriateness of these pillars as a basis for the whole curriculum and through example, has related it to the Visual Arts. Through initiating the Key Learning Area Cultural Literacy and Languages, Brisbane Catholic Education is making a real attempt at fostering a curriculum that enables students to know, to do, to be and to live together.

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